A MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF KANA COPULA VERBS

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ABSTRACT

*The paper described the morphology and semantics of copula verbs in Kana. The analysis was done utilizing a formal linguistic framework. The paper reported that three morphological variants of the copula verbs occur in the language: the overt copula, the null copula and the pseudo copula. The paper found that there are two forms of the overt copula, **lu** and **lè** with complementary syntactic distribution. **Lu** occurs in predicative constructions while **lè** occurs in existential and locative constructions. The paper showed that the null copula occurs in discourse contexts in which a sentence lacks an overt subject in surface syntax; while the pseudo copula occurs as a lexical variant of the Kana copula verb. The paper also found that Kana copula verbs express predicative, locative, existential and equative meanings in discourse structure. The paper claimed that the locative copula in Kana cannot occur in the progressive aspect which is a marked contrast to the situation in most Niger-Congo languages as a number of these languages permits progressivity in locative structures.*

KEYWORDS: Kana, Copula, Structure, Morphology, Semantics.

Introduction

This paper investigated the various morphological forms and the different meanings that copula verbs express in Kana within a formal linguistic framework. Kana is one of the four major languages spoken in Rivers State precisely in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria by approximately 300 000 people. It is closely related to Baan, Eleme, Tee and Gokana. These languages form a genetic unity and Williamson and Blench (2000:33) classify them in Delta-Cross of Cross River within the Bantoid-Cross of the East Benue-Congo branch of Benue-Congo.

According to Ikoro (1996:1):

"The Kana people are surrounded by neighbours, most of whom speak different but closely related languages. To the Northeast are the Ndoki, who speak the Ndoki dialect of Igbo. To the Northwest are Baan and Eleme, who speak the Baan and Eleme languages respectively. To the South are the Andoni, who speak Obolo and to the Southeast are the Gokana, speakers of the Gokana language. Among all these neighbors, the Baan, Eleme and Gokana are considered to have the same historical origin as the Kana. There are little or no cultural differences, and they consider themselves as one indivisible political entity called Ogoni. Their languages have been shown to be closely related, but still significantly and sufficiently different from each other to be called separate languages (cf. Wolff 1959b, 1964, and Williamson 1985)".

Defining the Copula

Crystal (1997:93) explains the concept of the copula as:

> "A verb which has little independent meaning and whose main function is to relate other elements of clause structure especially subject and complement".

A number of studies (e.g. Givon (1993), Pulleyblank (1995), Stassen (1997), Butler (2003), Pustet (2003), and Moro (2018)) agreed that the categorial structure of the copula element is a verb. Huddleston (1998:182) identifies the functions of a copula verb to include the expression of existential notions and thematic use in cleft structures. Generally, the idiosyncratic morphological and semantically variant features of the copula verb have made it an attractive research domain across languages.

Methodology

The researchers collected data from fluent native speakers of Kana with the help of field assistants. Direct oral interview was also used to elicit comparative data from native speakers of the language. Also, secondary sources of data such as texts and library materials were utilized.

Analyzing the Kana Copula

The kana copula element is a verb because it can be preceded by tense and aspect markers (henceforth TAM) as other verbs that occur in the language. Consider this data:

1a.   Dumka   lú   kááná   ẹẹ   nẹé
      PN   be   very   white   person
      'Dumka is a very fair person'

b.   Dumka   **weè**   lú   kááná   ẹẹ   nẹé
      PN   PST   be   very   white   person
      'Dumka was a very fair person'

c.   Dumka   **áá**   lú   kááná   ẹẹ   nẹé
      PN   PROG   be   very   white   person
      'Dumka is becoming a very fair person'

d.	Dumka	è	lú-a	kááná	ẹẹ	nẹé
	PN	PERF	be-INT	very	white	person

'Dumka has become a very fair person'

Observe that in (1a), the copula verb occurs in isolation in the sentence while it is preceded by the highlighted tense and aspect markers in (1b-d). This implies that the copula element **lú** is a verb since it can be preceded by TAM features just like other verbs in Kana.

In this study, the Kana copula verb is analyzed under two major linguistic levels: morphology and semantics. In what follows, we discuss the features of the copula verbs within each of these levels.

A. Morphological Structure of Copula Verbs

The copula verbs assume a number of morphological forms in Kana. These forms and their idiosyncratic features are examined.

i. The Overt Copula

There are two overt copula verbs in Kana. These are **lú** 'be' and **lè** 'be'. The copula verb **lú** is found in predicative constructions while **lè** is found in existential and locative constructions.

Examples:

2a).	Dumka	lú	nẹé	mene
	PN	be	person	rich

'Dumka is a wealthy person'

b).	Barile	lú	píá	nẹé
	PN	be	ugly/bad	person

'Barile is an ugly/bad person'

3a).	Bari	lè
	God	be

'God exists'

b).	Dum	lè
	Life	be

'Life exists'

4a).	Bẹrè	lè	nyóọ	kàsĩ
	Bag	be	on	chair

'The bag is on the chair'

b).	kpùgi	lè	bu	bẹrè
	money	be	inside	bag

'There is money in the bag'

c).	kpá	le	tó
	book	be	house

'The book is in the house'

Notice that the copula verb in (2a-b) generates predicative constructions while the copula verb in (3a-b) and (4a-c) generates existential and locative constructions respectively. Note that the existential copula in Kana does not obligatorily require a complement. Huddleston (1988:182) conceptualizes an existential construction as a grammatically independent construction that has to do with the expression of existential propositions, propositions that such-and-such exists.

ii. The Null Copula

The null copula occurs in a situation where the copula lacks a substantive NP to attach itself, hence it cannot float, the copula gets deleted in the surface structure. The copula verb in focus construction exemplifies this scenario. In focus structures, the substantive subject NP occurs in object position and the element **à** 'it' in subject position is a mere place holder which cannot host the copula verb.

Example:

5). à   lú   Ledum nẹ   (e)   á   yaa   lo   zĩá-á
It   COP   PN   FOCRCM   s/he   buy   the   yam DM
'It is Ledum that bought the yam'

The construction in (5) is a full-fledged cleft construction where the first part contains the copula verb **lú**, the focused constituent and focus marker while the second part houses a relative clause. Each part of the construction has its own verb. Thus, the copula construction **à lú** is basically used for clefting and not a focus marker. The form **à lú** is a combination of the redundant element **à** 'it' (a mere place holder and not a subject) with the copula verb **lú** 'is'. Both forms gloss as 'it is'. Speakers, however, tend to delete the copula verb **lú** in the surface structure owing to economy in speech.

Examples:

6). Ledum   nẹ   (e)   á   yaa   lo   zĩá-á
PN   FOCRCM   s/he   buy   the   yam DM
'It is Ledum that bought the yam'

The deletion of the redundant subject place holder **à** 'it' and the copula verb **lú** 'is' makes (6) a reduced cleft construction in the surface structure. Thus, (5) becomes the full form of (6). This explains why both structures have the same meaning. The postulation here is that (5) remains the underlying form of (6); implying that the copula verb which is not found in the surface structure of (6) can be recovered from the deep structure in (5). Therefore, (5) and (6) share the same meaning and are stylistic variants of the same construction.

This shows that the copula verb in Kana has a null form in overt syntax under certain grammatical conditions just as different grammatical features may give rise to different morphological forms for the English copula verb (cf. be, am, is, are, was, were etc.).

iii.   The Pseudo Copula

Kana can sometimes adopt stative verbs such as bee 'resembles', ẹré 'have', súá 'know' and bia 'remain' in copula function since stative verbs are ascriptive. There is no overt action expressed in the meaning of stative verbs. Emenanjo (1978) conceptualizes it as a verb that is used in the expression of states of being, qualities and existential notions. Stative verbs do not imply an activity rather they imply a state, quality, condition etc. Thus, pseudo copula verbs or semi copula verbs in Kana are simply stative verbs that enter into copulative functions as lexical variants of the copula verbs.

B.   Semantic Structure of Copula Verbs

There are quite a number of meanings expressed by copula verbs in Kana which lead to a variety of copula constructions in the language. These constructions are examined in what follows.

i.   Predicative Copula Construction

The predicative copula construction in Kana shows a descriptive function. The complement of the construction assigns some attributes to the subject. In a predicative copula sentence, there is no object. Any NP that occurs in complement position merely describes the subject. Thus, predicative copula constructions in Kana lack a patient theta role. Consider (7) and (8).

> 7)   Barika   ẹè   lo   nwii
> PN   be   the   child
> 'Barika is the child'

> 8)   Barika   fé   lo   nwii
> PN   kill   the   child
> 'Barika killed the child'

In (7), the NP **lo nwii** 'the child' is simply a complement which modifies the subject. It has no theta role assigned to it. However, in (8), the NP **lo nwii** 'the child' is a direct object because a patient role is assigned to it. Thus, while the NP in (7) occurs in a copula construction, the NP in (8) does not.

The predicative copula construction usually takes the adjectival phrase as its canonical complement, as seen in (9):

> 9)   Barika   lú   káána   píá
> PN   be   very   ugly/bad
> 'Barika is very ugly'

Thus, the predicative copula construction is purely an ascriptive construction in which the subject of a sentence is directly linked to the complement through the verb for the overt identification and/or description of the subject.

ii.   Locative Construction

The locative copula **le** is used to express a locative meaning in Kana. This copula takes a locative prepositional phrase a complement as illustrated in (10) and (11):

10) Ànùè   le   bú   lo   kpò
     Bird   be   inside   the   box
     'The bird is inside the cage'

11) Kate   le   nyọó   té
     PN   be   up   tree
     'Kate is on the tree'

Ikoro (1996:141) posits that, "in quite a number of Niger-Congo languages including Yoruba, Ewe and languages belonging to the Kru family, it is possible to have a locative verb in the progressive". He however asserts that the locative verb is the only verb that cannot occur in the progressive in Kana.

This distinction functionally fixes the locative copula in a distinct class from the stative verbs. Thus, the major function of the locative copula in Kana is the expression of a locative meaning.

iii.   Existential Copula Construction

This type of copula construction assigns existential meaning to the subject. The unique characteristics of the existential copula construction is that, the existential copula verb that it carries occurs without a complement, yet it is grammatical and also acceptable.

There is some sort of morphological semblance between the existential copula verb and the locative copula; but in spite of their similarity, both copula constructions are adjudged to be distinct in meaning. The only existential copula verb attested in Kana is lè 'be'. This verb assigns existential notion to its subject as indicated in (12) and (13):

12) Barika   lè
     PN   be
     'Barika exists'

13) lo   ànùè   lè
     The   bird   be
     'The bird exists/is alive'

iv.   Equative Copula Construction

The equative copula in Kana generates an inverse relation between the subject of the verb and its complement. It can be regarded as a sub-type of the predicative copula. It sub-categorizes only NPs as complements.

Examples:

14) Barika   ẹè   lo   nwii
     PN   be   the   child
     'Barika is the child'

15) lo   nwii   ẹè   Barika
     the   child   be   PN
     'The child is Barika'

Observe that in (14), the complement of the construction delimits the subject. By contrast, the subject in (14) is found in complement position in (15), where it also delimits the subject. Notice that the syntactic relations between the forms **Barika** 'PN' and **lo nwii** 'the child' is an inverse relation. Thus, the constructions in (14) and (15) actually express an equative meaning through this inverse syntactic relationship.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the morphology and semantics of the copula verb in Kana. The study analyzed the copula morpheme as a verb since it can co-occur with tense and aspect markers like other substantive verbs in the language.

The paper investigated the morphological structure of the copula verb in Kana and distinguished such forms as the overt copula, the null copula and the pseudo copula as distinct copula forms within the verbal morphology of the language. The paper also analyzed the semantics of copula verbs and found that copula verbs express predicative, locative, existential and equative meaning in the language. Interestingly, each of these semantic notions generates their respective constructions within the grammatical structure of the language.

The paper reported that the null copula occurs in discourse contexts in which a sentence does not have an overt subject in surface syntax; while the pseudo copula occurs as a lexical variant of the copula verb and the locative copula cannot occur in the progressive aspect in Kana.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are vital:

1. Further research be conducted to document the overall grammatical features of copula constructions in Kana.

2. An independent investigation of the syntactic features of copula verbs in Kana should be done.

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